UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Radio Service
OFFICE OF INFORMATION

HOMEMAKERS' CHAT TUESDAY MAY 7, 1940.

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "INSECT QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS!" Information from the Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

Questions about insects take first place in the mailbag these spring days. Letters here come from gardeners, housewives, and home owners, all with urgent inquiries about insects. The answers to these questions come from entomologists of the Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Entomology and Plant Quarantine.

Let's begin with 3 questions about termites. Around this time of year ants and termites both have wings and take to the air. It's the mating season for both these insects. Many a home-owner, coming on flying antlike insects around the house, naturally worries for fear termites are in his walls.

The first question today is: "How can I tell the difference between flying ants and flying termites?"

The entomologists say: Look at the waistline and look at the wings. If the insect has a fashionable "wasp waist", it's a flying ant. If it has a thick waist, it's a termite. Now look at the wings. Both flying ants and flying termites have 2 pairs of wings. But termites have 2 pairs of long identical wings, twice the length of the body. Ants have a long outer pair of wings and small wings underneath, not much longer than the body.

So the waistline and the wings are your clues for distinguishing between flying ants and flying termites.

Now here's a letter from another home-owner with termite worries. He writes "I've just discovered some insect damage in the wood of my house. I don't know whether termites or ants have been at work. Is there any way to tell from the damaged wood which insect is responsible?"

Yes, the entomologists suggest several ways to distinguish between ant and termite work. They say most kinds of household ants don't destroy wood, but carpenter ants do. However, carpenter ants are not often a serious problem because they only nest in the wood; they do not feed on wood as termites do. You can recognize the work of the carpenter ant by the little pile of sawdust or shredded wood fiber it leaves just outside the opening in wood where it has been working. The termite uses the wood for food, so it leaves no pile of wooddust. Another way to distinguish between the work of carpenter ants and termites is to see whether the insect has worked parallel with the grain of the wood or has cut across the grain, The carpenter ant cuts across the grain, but the termite works with the grain, leaving only thin partitions between the tunnels he makes. Still another clue is the looks of the wood; whether it is left clean or dirty. The carpenter ant is a neat worker. He leaves the wood clean and unstained. But the termite leaves the earthy or clay particles along the tunnels it has made. Finally, if wood is weakene from underneath or collapses, you can be sure that is termite trouble, not ant work.

Now here's the third question about termites: "Can termites get into the wood of a house through a brick or cement wall?"

Termites can get into a house by way of a brick wall if the mortar is defective so that cracks or open places allow the insects to reach the wood from the ground. Termites cannot go through a solid cement wall, but they often build tunnel up the side of such a wall or through any cracks in the wall. Metal shields placed on top of the cement or the brick wall, and a layer of cement above to insulate the wood, are the best protection against termites.

Other letters coming in this week inquire about the tick that carries spotted fever. One letter says: "Now that tick season has started, please tell us how to protect ourselves and our animals from these insects."

Here are suggestions from the entomologists for the control of ticks:

First, all hunters or farmers working in brush or thickets should wear high

boots or leggings over their trousers to keep ticks out. And they should examine themselves frequently during the day as well as at the end of the day to see if any ticks have attached themselves. (A favorite place for ticks to locate is in the hair at the back of the neck.) To kill ticks on clothes, fumigate clothes with carbon tetracholride overnight. (Carbon tetracholoride, you remember, is a safe cleaning fluid. It kills ticks as well as taking out grease spots.)

Here is what the entomologists suggest for keeping ticks off dogs. Dust dogs with derris powder or dip them in a derris wash several times a week during tick season. If you find ticks on a dog, do not remove them by hand. Use tweezers or a piece of paper. Drop the tick in kerosene oil.

Adult ticks prefer to take their meals from dogs as meal tickets, but they will also fasten on humans, on cattle, on foxes, opossums, and other large warm-blooded animals. But young ticks take their meals only from meadow mice or other small rodents. You can help protect domestic animals from ticks by burning underbrush, cleaning out thickets, and having clean pastures. Grazing sheep on overgrown land helps, too. Meadow mice and ticks do not thrive in open country. They like plenty of moist damp brush.

That finishes the questions today. But remember -- if you have further questions about ants, termites, ticks or any other troublesome insect, you are welcome to write to the Department of Agriculture for advice and for free bulletins.

#####